

Southern Progress

A serene, sylvan setting and a radical approach to city planning have made Greenville, South Carolina, a surprising new hot spot. **BY TOM VANDERBILT**



Joe Clarke, chef-owner of American Grocery Restaurant in Greenville, South Carolina, was running late for our meeting. But provisioned with an Autumn Sweater cocktail (a blend of pecan-infused bourbon and black-walnut bitters) and a plate of fried deviled eggs, I was in no ruckus-making mood.

Clarke was behind schedule because he had been working on the launch of his second restaurant—a far harder task today than when he opened American Grocery nine years ago, for reasons implied by the crane toiling on a new high-end apartment building outside. It's just one of multiple signs that Greenville, though a name that may still draw a blank for many (its official hashtag is the self-deprecating #yeahTHATgreenville), is on a fevered upswing. →



Clockwise from top left: Falls Park's Liberty Bridge, which replaced a four-lane car crossing; Bill Mitchell of Billiam jeans store; a server at Tandem Creperie & Coffeehouse.

BEYOND

Urban Study

Clarke, a South Carolina native who worked in Hollywood for a dozen years, returned to the state with his wife in 2005. Back then, Greenville's West End neighborhood, where

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Where
to stay, eat,
and shop,
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he took over a boarded-up building, was somewhat down at the heels. Today, his place sits on a virtual restaurant row that's soon to be inhabited by chef Sean Brock, whose Husk in Charleston was named by *Bon Appétit* as the Best New Restaurant in America in 2011.

My own path to Greenville began when I met the now-retired professional cyclist George Hincapie at an event in Tennessee. When he enthusiastically mentioned his adopted home, I nodded knowingly—then realized I knew nothing about it. Hincapie, who grew up in New York City, discovered Greenville when his brother moved to the area, and the

cyclist quickly realized it would make a great place for his winter training. "You could be downtown and get to the mountains without hitting stoplights," Hincapie said. Now he and his brother own Hotel Domestique, a château-inspired property in nearby Travelers Rest that's perfectly placed to accommodate the new breed of visitor being drawn to the area.

Everywhere I went in Greenville, I kept running into returning natives or transplants drawn by its laid-back lifestyle who can now only shake their heads in wonder at the recent changes to this long-dormant city. Carl Sobocinski, a New Hampshire native who came to study at Clemson University and never left, opened the New Southern restaurant Soby's in 1997—a seminal moment in the town's revival (today his Table 301 group runs 11 venues in town). As we ate wreckfish with kale at his Lazy Goat restaurant, Sobocinski told me,

"Fifteen years ago, you would hear only Southern accents on the streets." The arrival of a BMW plant in 1994, followed by a host of ancillary companies, introduced a cosmopolitan workforce and, with it, a more polyglot presence.

But the place always had what real estate agents call "good bones." With its proximity to the Blue Ridge Mountains, it first flourished in the early 19th century as a resort town known as Pleasantburg. By the late 1800s, cotton mills began to bloom on the banks of the Reedy River, followed by textile factories. The city emerged as an industrial hub with a progressive bent (it was, the WPA Guide noted in 1941, a "hot-bed of Union sentiment"). It lost the name Pleasantburg long ago—but not the pleasantness.

Today, that mixture of economic vitality, progressive spirit, and leafy calm is evident everywhere. One balmy afternoon, I took a walk along the riverfront Swamp Rabbit Trail—a

The Evolution of All-Inclusive IN MONTEGO BAY



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21-mile path named after the now-defunct railway it replaced—that took me from downtown to a lush park surrounding a spectacular waterfall. The whole scene is crowned by Liberty Bridge, a 345-foot-long pedestrian-only suspension bridge that affords unobstructed views of the falls with the city in the background.

This idyllic picture did not come about by accident: the bridge was formerly a four-lane car crossing that cast a pall over the heavily polluted river below. It took a concerted campaign led by the city's mayor, Knox White, to get it torn down in 2002. That was the latest in a series of initiatives—fairly radical for a small Southern city—to try and turn around a place that had, in postwar years, begun to decline with the fortunes of the textile industry. In the 1970s, facing the increasing desolation of its downtown, the city hired prominent landscape architect Lawrence Halprin to

turn Main Street from a busy thoroughfare into a two-lane street with angled parking, trees, and benches.

Today, that Main Street seems torn from a handbook on New Urbanism—a tree-lined, pedestrian-friendly place with retailers like the venerable Mast General Store, whose vast stock once included caskets but now tilts more toward Filson bags and old-fashioned candies (“clove ovals,” anyone?). The scene isn’t all “ye olde,” however. At Methodical Coffee, a Brooklyn-worthy spot near the new Aloft hotel, you will find plenty of twentysomethings on laptops (the city, home to tech “accelerators” like Iron Yard Ventures, has been dubbed the Silicon Valley of the Southeast).

One afternoon I went to buy jeans at Billiam, a specialty store where rolls of denim from nearby producer Cone Mills line the walls. The owner, Bill Mitchell, a lean, bearded character in cuffed jeans, came to Greenville in his teens, studied at a local college, and stayed, opting to capitalize on the local market rather than pay higher rents in a larger city.

Here, among Mitchell’s collection of vintage Union Special sewing machines, I found not only a fine pair of jeans but also a perfect distillation of Greenville: the old meeting the new; a start-up energy overlaid with gentle Southern hospitality; a small gem you want to tell your friends about. As the locals put it: Yeah, *that* Greenville. ■

With its proximity to the Blue Ridge Mountains, Greenville always had what real estate agents call ‘good bones.’



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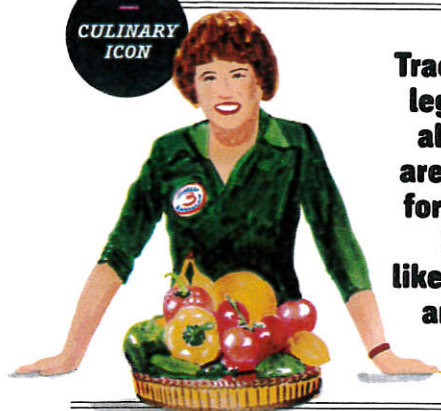
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The Details

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Traces of Julia Child's legacy can be found all over the Boston area, where she lived for 40 years. Explore her go-to spots like Savor's Market and Harvest, both in Cambridge.

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

(What's Cooking in Bean Town, p. 32)

For hotels, shops, and more editor's picks, see our *Boston Travel Guide* at tandl.me/bostonguide and download the T+L Travel Guide app from the App Store or Google Play.

RESTAURANTS & CAFÉS

Asta Chef and Noma alum Alex Crabb and his girlfriend, Shish Parsigian, offer their take on New Nordic cuisine at this high-ceilinged space in the Back Bay. astaboston.com; *tasting menus from \$50.*

Branch Line This bright spot in a repurposed 19th-century arsenal is known for its roast chicken and rotisserie drippings. *Watertown*; branchlinearsenal.com; *entrées \$12–\$25.*

Café Art Science Contemporary American cuisine with a French accent, served Parisian-bistro style in a glass-walled building in Kendall Square. The bar and associated laboratory puts a high-tech gloss on a complex that combines learning, innovation, and flavor. *Cambridge*; cafeartscience.com; *entrées \$18–\$38.*

Flour Bakery & Café James Beard Award-winning pastry chef Joanne Chang serves generous, sunny takes on classics like chocolate brioche and lemon meringue pie at her many locations around town. flourbakery.com.

George Howell Coffee This elegant space in the Godfrey Hotel

serves some of the city's best small-batch brews from a specialty coffee pioneer who influenced a generation of roasters and continues to set the standard. *Downtown Crossing*; georgehowellcoffee.com.

Loyal Nine Chef Mark Sheehan pays tribute to New England's historical cuisine. The restaurant features modern décor and a pleasant terrace beside the train tracks. *Cambridge*; loyalninecambridge.com; *entrées \$18–\$22.*

Oleana This restaurant, which has a kitchen run by women and an enchanting garden that is open into the fall, serves Ana Sortun's original, Pan-Mediterranean dishes. *Cambridge*; oleanarestaurant.com; *entrées \$25–\$28.*

Sarma A colorful, airy neighborhood restaurant serving Cassie Piuma's Mediterranean comfort food, with small plates on trays in a lively room hung with ceramics. *Somerville*; sarma-restaurant.com; *entrées \$5–\$17.*

Sofra The standouts at this Mediterranean café are pastry chef and co-owner Maura Kilpatrick's irresistible creations, like chocolate-hazelnut baklava and almond-rose cake. *Cambridge*; sofrabakery.com.

Uni Restaurateur Ken Oringer's hopping sushi and sashimi restaurant has elegant dark-wood Japanese fittings that belie the Catalan, French, and Thai influences in its high-energy, vibrant dishes. *Back Bay*; uni-boston.com; *entrées \$6–\$22.*

GREENVILLE, SOUTH CAROLINA

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HOTELS

Aloft Greenville Downtown Located in the heart of the city, this property gives guests easy access to some of Greenville's most popular attractions. aloft.com; *doubles from \$199.*

Hotel Domestique A cycling-friendly inn near the North Carolina border run by former professional cyclist George Hincapie. *Travelers Rest*; hotel-domestique.com; *doubles from \$375.*

RESTAURANTS & CAFÉS

American Grocery Restaurant A sophisticated spot with innovative takes on regional fare and a sublime cocktail list. *Americagr.com*; *entrées \$26–\$42.*

Methodical Coffee This coffee bar at One City Plaza serves lovely brews and recently expanded to a full-roasting complex just outside downtown Greenville. methodicalcoffee.com.

Sidewall Pizza Co. A casual joint perfect for carb-loading before a hike along the Swamp Rabbit Trail. *Travelers Rest*; sidewallpizza.com; *pizzas \$13–\$20.*

Soby's Carl Sobocinski does modern takes on Southern classics, such as shrimp and grits with charred-tomato broth and country ham. sobys.com; *entrées \$18–\$31.*

Swamp Rabbit Café Stock up on snacks and sandwiches before heading out for a picnic. *Swamp Rabbit Cafe*.

Tandem Creperie & Coffeehouse

The fillings at this crêpe house range from blueberry and cream to sausage and potato. *Travelers Rest*; tandemcc.com; *crêpes \$3.50–\$8.50.*

SHOPS

William The denim brand makes all of its products in-house in Greenville and donates 20 percent of its profits to an organization fighting sex trafficking. williamjeans.com.

M. Judson Booksellers & Storytellers Named after a local 19th-century educator, this bookstore is located in a gorgeous converted Beaux-Arts courthouse. mjudsonbooks.com.

We Took to the Woods An elegant boutique carrying emerging fashion brands like KikaNY and Merz b. Schwanen. Pick up one of the store's unique scented candles in quirky aromas like "Blue Jeans, White Shirt." wetooktothewoods.com.

BUYER'S GUIDE

(THE DANISH GIRL, P. 112)

Salvatore Ferragamo

\$1,090 (*Salvatore Ferragamo boutiques*, 866-337-7242); **Levi's** \$88 (levi.com); **Prada** \$1,770 (prada.com).

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Marni \$1,440 (*Marni boutiques*); **Rebecca Taylor** \$195 (rebeccataylor.com); **3.1 Phillip Lim** \$575 (31philliplim.com); **Altuzarra** price upon request (altuzarra.com).

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Miu Miu \$3,345 (miumiui.com); **Sea** \$250 (matchesfashion.com); **Rag & Bone** \$350 (rag-bone.com); **Salvatore Ferragamo** \$1,590 (see above).

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Red Valentino \$550 (bergdorf-goodman.com); **Altuzarra** blouse, \$1,495 (barneys.com), and earrings, price upon request (altuzarra.com); **Fendi** \$650 (fendi.com); **Sophie Bille Brahe** \$1,220 (sophiebillebrahe.com); **Gucci** \$1,590 (gucci.com).

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Prada jacket, \$2,400, and bag, \$1,770 (prada.com); **Michael Kors** \$1,250 (select *Michael Kors stores*, 866-709-5677); **Tod's** \$675 (tods.com).

Content in this issue was produced with assistance from d'Angleterre, Hotel SP34, and the Lowell.